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SUBJECT: TURKEY: WELL-CONNECTED DIYARBAKIR MP TAKES A HARD
LOOK AT THE PKK, THE KURDISH PROBLEM

Classified By: PolCouns Janice G Weiner, reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary and comment: Governing party MP from Diyarbakir Ihsan Arslan's prescription for solving the current impasse Turkey faces with respect to the terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), northern Iraq and the US is that Turkey must take a hard look at the damaging policies it has pursued for years. Turkey is on the cusp of a cross-border operation (CBO) which would prove damaging to Turkey and the region. The US should press Barzani and Talabani; the PKK must, in the end, lay down arms; and Turkey has much internal work to do to resolve its own problems. One major piece of the puzzle is domestic: Arslan believes the opposition wants to force PM Erdogan's hand, because they know that prosecuting a CBO will weaken the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). It will also, he concluded, be bad for Turkey and damage prospects for true progress on the Kurdish issue. Arslan, whose family is close to Erdogan, exerts influence on the PM in matters Kurdish. His views are a useful barometer of AKP thinking at the top. And while they may not seem outlandish to us, it is a measure of the current hyped nationalism that when he expounded them on a TV talk show, he was excoriated publicly and in parliament. End summary and comment.

12. (C) Ihsan Arslan, a long-time Mazlum-Der human rights activist and AKP MP for Diyarbakir, told us November 1 that the situation on the ground is changing constantly. In the current situation, two plus two may equal four one day, but the next day it may not; policy should be reviewed accordingly. In Turkey, once made, policy is static. He sees this as Turkey's Achilles' heel as it approaches the current impasse with the terrorist PKK, the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq and the US.

13. (C) In Arslan's view, Ankara helped create the current problem through its undifferentiated, decades-long iron-fisted approach to the problem. Doctor Turkey had misdiagnosed the illness and, as a result, pursued the wrong treatment. This had made the problem worse. Turkey had been making the same mistakes for 85 years; the result was 30,000 people dead. "We need to change the medicine, otherwise the patient will die."

14. (C) The situation is similar vis-a-vis northern Iraq.

Arslan believes that Turkey has made many wrong decisions over the years. In the process, it confused friends and foes alike. The time has come for Turkey to review its policies, just as the US did with regard to Iraq.

15. (C) Ironically, it appears that the US (and Turkish) policy of defending Iraq's territorial integrity has allowed the PKK free rein. If Barzani does not act, Turkey will feel compelled to do so. If Turkey were to challenge Barzani militarily, it would be tantamount to challenging Turkey's own Kurds. The US must realize this. If Turkey undertakes a limited operation, aimed at several PKK camps, reaction will be muted; if, however, it is broader and civilian casualties are involved, the southeast would ignite.

16. (C) The only solution is for the PKK to lay down arms. If not, Turkey will feel obliged to respond in kind. If the PKK does not receive support - even tacit - from the US, as well as from Barzani and Talabani, how can it keep up the attacks? Whether it realizes it or not, the US enjoys influence over both the PKK and Barzani; just as the US opposes the Sunni resistance in Iraq, it could successfully oppose the PKK. Barzani sees the lack of US action and follows suit.

17. (C) It is now up to the US to prevent the PKK from hurting Turkey. Otherwise, using the PKK as a pretext, Turkey may hurt Barzani as well. The nationalists - Nationalist Action Party (MHP) chair Bahceli and Republican People's Party (CHP) chair Baykal - now put Barzani on equal footing with the PKK. PM Erdogan's GOT does not. US pressure on Barzani and Talabani may have a positive impact on the PKK, which may desist from violent attacks, even if it does not lay down arms.

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18. (C) The core of the problem lies within Turkey. Absent this current crisis, the GOT would have resolved the issue over the next four to five years. AKP did not win most MP seats in the southeast by accident - it delivered the first real services to people there in decades. If the situation calms down, AKP will capture - with votes - the SE's major municipalities in the 2009 local elections, invest more and allow the Kurdish language to be used more freely. This will, he believes, finish off the PKK.

19. (C) If Turkey turns these current skirmishes into a war, it will serve the PKK, not the Kurds. In fact, one primary target of a CBO is neither the PKK nor Barzani - it is Turkish domestic politics and Erdogan's AKP. Baykal and Bahceli - and the military - appear prepared to go to any lengths to weaken AKP, even at great cost to Turkey. The US can help with Barzani; only Turkey can deal with its own internal political problems. He compared Turkey to an elephant, bothered by a mosquito; the elephant might rampage in its effort to get rid of the mosquito. At that point, it will not be possible to ask why it wrought havoc for such a small creature.

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